

He Asks How I Am

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Summary:

After a year of writing to each other through an anonymous pen pal program, Eddie and Richie end up at the same school, completely unaware of their deeper connection.

Things get pretty gay.

(Part One Too Many in the saga of Bridget Being Bad at Summaries)

1. How Can I Reply?

Fall 2016

“A *pen pal* program?” Eddie pondered in response to the flyer his therapist had handed him, kind of shocked. The idea felt so ... antiquated, like something from a movie his mom would watch.

“Yes, Eddie, it is an anonymous program that we are testing out to help students talk to each other about the problems they share and ask for help without fear of consequence. Does it maybe sound like something you could be interested in? I think you’d be a good candidate, Eddie.” Dr. Fatima explained. Eddie liked her a lot, her voice was always soothing. She was always *always* calm, even when he was being a fucking ball of panic.

“I ... guess? Why do you think that?”

“Because, I think you have a habit of getting too much in your head and writing these things on paper, bouncing them off of another person might be good for you. I know you aren’t quite comfortable doing this with any of your friends yet and while talking to me is probably helpful, I’m sure it would also help to talk to someone *your age*. Plus, you are very smart and kind and I know you would be very helpful to whoever is assigned to be you partner. I also know that you will take it seriously.”

“Wow... um, thanks, Dr. F. Yeah, if you think it’s a good idea, I’ll definitely do it.” Eddie said. Dr. F looked slightly surprised, but she hid it well. She was a professional after all.

Honestly, Eddie was a little surprised he said yes too. Talking about his sickness and honestly just *everything in life* was hard enough with Dr. F and he had been seeing her for *years*. The thought of doing that with a stranger? Literally terrifying... but, there was this random annoying voice in the back of his head that agreed that this would be good for him. That maybe opening up wasn’t the worst thing in the world.

He went through the set-up of his account with Dr. F, making sure

the whole time that it would be *completely* anonymous. Apparently it was unlikely that he would even get matched with someone from this district, let alone the state. There were applicants from all over the Northeast.

When he got the email (Anon11@gmail.com) and his password, written neatly on a pink post-it note, he left the office, already starting drafts of the letter he was going to write in his head as he ran out to meet his friends.

They knew he had his weekly counseling meetings on Fridays but they were still willing to wait the extra half an hour for him because... well because he had the best fucking friends ever. But he still told them that he only went to these appointments because his mom made him. He still wasn't able to talk to them about *anything*.

Because the hypochondriac shit was tolerable in the seventh grade but now that he was practically a senior in high school... he needed to get the fuck over it. And he heard that from *himself* enough, the thought of hearing it from his friends was... terrifying.

So when Bill asked him how his session went, Eddie just brushed him off and changed the subject to what they were doing that evening, trying to put all of that mental illness stuff to the back of his mind for as long as he could manage.

###

Eddie stared at the blank page for longer than was probably good for his eyes. He just didn't know *how to start*. It felt weird just talking about all the things that were wrong with him right off the bat but he also couldn't really talk about anything else? Saying his grade or his gender or anything about anything he fucking likes to do might give his identity away.

So it takes him awhile to start. But when he does, the words come surprisingly easy.

Hello stranger,

I hope you don't think this is as awkward as I do but I'm going to be upfront and honest when I say I don't think this will work, actually. I fully, completely, and utterly think I cannot.... Be helped. Which sounds emo and sad but it's just how I feel. I'm not clinically depressed or in danger of hurting myself or anything, I just don't think I can be helped. My life is going to be a struggle.

I should probably share that my clinical diagnosis is anxiety and acute hypochondria. So it is literally engrained in my nature to think that something is constantly wrong with me. Given that, I've kind of grown accustomed to that fact that my brain is always going to make life... suck.

BUT according to my therapist, that doesn't mean that high school has to suck. Just because my brain is a pain doesn't mean I'm forfeiting joy. I have to find a balance. And I am not doing that... at all. Because high school is awful. AWFUL.

*I mean, I have friends, really, really great friends, but I don't like to talk to them about how my lungs are constantly heavy because I just know that just sitting in the cafeteria means I'm breathing in 100000000 germs from my disgusting unhygienic peers, or how I still take the pills my mom gives to me even though I **know** they're placebos, or how sometimes I swear I can feel germs crawling on my skin and no matter how much Purell I scrub on my hands, I can't change that.*

I've never talked to them about it because I don't want them to look at me and see someone that's broken.

BUT you are across the internet and thus will never look at me so.... I suppose that makes it easier.

Wow, I'm sorry for starting off really heavy. But I guess we might as well get straight to the point, you know? Fuck small talk, honestly, it's for the birds. Plus, any small talk we might have might lead one of us to figure out who the other is and that kind of defeats every point of this.

Hope to hear from you soon,

Um Idk How to Sign This So I'm Just Gonna Say "Me"

p.s. okay I don't wanna seem too optimistic or anything but Fuck

maybe this will work? I do kind of feel better typing some of that out but also I am very afraid to hit send. DILEMMAS. If this makes it to you I am stronger than I currently think I am.

###

Richie stared at the letter he had re-read 8 times in kind of shock. He had been fretting for so long trying to figure out what to say and this kid just beats him to it! And he did such a good job too! Richie read the letter and he laughed, he teared up a little, he *really* felt an attachment to this person and it was only one letter.

How was Richie supposed to pull off that same level of ... *talent*. Ugh. He just had to do his best.

Whatever that amounted too.

Heyooo,

So I don't know how you managed to make a letter talking about serious problems..... Cute but shit it was cute. I hope that isn't insulting. I am told I can be insulting sometimes. A lot of the times. I don't mean to be but... it happens. I'll try not to let that happen with you.

Also, I totally understand where you're coming from; I'm not so sure this is going to help fuck all either, but despite what people may think, I do try to be pretty optimistic so I'll do my best.

I'm sorry you have to struggle. Honest. I know we don't know each other but you seem good and no good person should have to struggle that much. I mean a little struggle is a part of life, but we already have a little struggle. We're in high school for fucks sake. Throw a mental illness on top of that and that's just UNFAIR and UNCALLED FOR, am I right? Yeah, I AM right, thanks for agreeing babe.

Anyway, it's nice that you have friends. My family moves around a lot, my parents never really able to settle in one place which is just one of the many reasons that friends have never been something that have been easy for me. I'm kind of jealous of you. Really goddamn jealous.

WOW that is not something I would ever admit in person, this online persona thing makes it real easy to be brave? Fuck. Unexpected.

I guess I should also say that MY clinical diagnosis is ADHD and manic depression. That's also called bipolar disorder but I don't like calling it that because that one has a negative connotation in my head. Idk why, I know its irrational but I'm pretty sure irrationality is a part of my disease probably maybe so shit's unavoidable. Anyway, I basically just have some intense mood swings and teachers tend not to jive with that. Let alone my peers. Most people think I'm too much to handle.

Especially my parents.

What are your parents like? They help you with your head stuff? Mine don't. Sometimes I think they've forgotten about me completely but other times I think they remember everything about me and have consciously chosen to pretend I don't exist. That's definitely the worse thought.

Hope to hear from you soon,

I Also Don't Know What the Fuck to Sign This, That's a Good Point, so I'll Just Say "Me 2.0" :D

p.s. are you SO sure we'll never meet? I mean, say all of this goes BEST CASE SCENARIO and we become best-fucking-friends? Could we meet then? Or no. Is this all too soon, should I just default operate on the idea that we will never ever meet?

Richie pressed send and felt like a weight had dropped off his shoulders. Writing that letter had actually been pretty cathartic. He really hoped the person would respond back because it felt really really good to actually talk about... real things.

This was honestly the first thing his shitty therapist in this shitty town had ever done for him. Of all the places Richie's parents had dragged him, he disliked Bloomington, Maryland the most. It may be 2016 everywhere else in America, but here it was still the 1950s. Or at least that's what it felt like.

He was actually hooking up with the closeted quarterback of the

football, who called him a *fag* once. He was pretty sure there were kids here who had never even *seen* a person of color.

So getting help from someone in this backwards awful town?

Revolutionary.

Since Richie was desperate for human contact, he proofread his letter probably more times than was necessary before finally deeming it worthy to send at exactly 12AM. When he went to sleep, he actually found himself *excited* to get a response.

Maybe this would help him get through however long he had to stay here before his parents inevitably decided to move the fuck on from this town.

Or maybe not and Richie would be doomed to never have one fucking friend, never ever ever.

Either one would be fine.

###

Fall 2017

Richie couldn't stop tapping his foot. He wanted to, his thigh muscles were honestly starting to get sore. But he couldn't stop. Being at a new school always made him nervous, no matter how many times he experienced the change. He kind of wished someone would put their hand on his leg, smile at him, and hold his hand. Comfort sounded... so nice. Ultimately unrealistic and he had never met her, but it still sounded nice.

"Richie Tozier?" the receptionist called out and he sat up a little straighter in his seat.

"Yeah?"

"We just need you to fill out some paperwork real quick, just some basic questions to help the counselor. Would you mind?" she asked, holding out a clipboard. He nodded and jumped out of his seat, glad for the distraction.

Even if it didn't make sense, since they had all his files? What could he tell them that they didn't already know?

He was hyperactive, a poorly-adjusted but intelligent trouble maker with a big mouth and a habit of falling asleep during lectures. Oh and he had at one point been suicidal.

No big deal.

But these weren't questions like that. They were more along the lines of "How are you adjusting to Derry?" Okay. He went to class, he went home. He did homework. He smoked. He talked to Email Person. He played his guitar. Was there more to do? It was Derry.

"Are you finding classes to be exceedingly difficult?" Not particularly. The actual courses were easy as fuck. Maybe a little too much homework for his taste, but he managed. Thank GOD for Adderall. The number of detentions he had in the past week might make it seem like the teachers struck him the wrong way but honestly, it was just so that he didn't have to figure out where he would sit at lunch. (He made it all the way to Friday without having to cross that bridge.)

Also, going too long without causing trouble made him feel itchy. It was as if *calm* was something he didn't deserve, so turmoil he thus caused.

"Have you considered joining any clubs/teams?" LMAOOO. Did they have a nap club on campus?

"Any troubles you might want to mention that were not included on the rest of this form?" Nah. Richie wasn't a snitch and that including snitching on his absent parents and his wonky brain. Yeah, maybe he felt tired all the time and maybe he could tell he was heading towards one of those phases where sleep was the only thing he looked forward to and yelling was the only way he could actually hear what he was saying, but who cares? He wasn't gonna write that on a blue form with a pen with a flower on the tip of it.

That would be silly.

So instead he wrote *no* and added a little smiley face to acknowledge that he knew *and* they knew he was lying. And then he stood up to give the clipboard back to the receptionist.

Of course, in doing so he bumped into a boy who had just walked in.

“Hey, *Jesus*, watch where you’re going, would you?” the boy snapped, kind of breathless. Richie was speechless for a hot sec because this boy was *so cute*. Pastel blue long sleeve shirt and white shorts that rested just above his knees, not to mention the *freckles* and soft brown hair that was just growing in to something curly.... Damn he looked so soft.

He wouldn’t have expected *sass*. Richie’s lips curled into a smile as he apologized.

“Sorry, my bad, cutie, I wasn’t paying attention.”

“Yeah, well, you were probably given those ugly glasses for a *reason* so maybe you should use them.” The boy added, making Richie laugh out loud, mostly in shock. People weren’t usually... mean to him. He painted kind of an imposing picture. He was almost six feet tall, always wore his black jean jacket over his flannels, unbuttoned enough to give a hint of the tattoos he’d managed to get on his collarbones. He’d also been told he had kind of a resting bitch face which could turn people off.

ALTHOUGH people also told him that it was sometimes worse when he smiled, that his smile spelt more trouble than just the blank face. So really, nothing he could do was approachable apparently. Or right in general.

The boy sat down with a huff and immediately brought his knees up to his chin, seeming done with Richie completely. Which, yeah, he could respect.

Richie handed the clipboard to the receptionist and then went back to sit down, maybe a little closer to the boy this time. Only one or two chairs closer, nothing obvious. Just enough to make staring a little easier.

Oh fuck he was being so creepy though.

Too much staring would be bad for him in the long run anyway because, honestly, looking at something that beautiful had to be bad for the rods and cones in his eyes, right? Like staring at the sun. Or an eclipse. So Richie pulled out his phone instead and settled on trying to beat his high score in Temple Run (yeah he never stopped playing it... sue him).

He got so into his game that he didn't notice that the (not) soft boy™ had started to breathe a little heavier. He didn't notice until it honestly started to sound like hyperventilating.

Richie paused his game and looked up, shocked to see the kid kind of freaking the fuck out.

What was he supposed to *do*? He checked over at the receptionist's area and she was gone, *of course*, so Richie decided to take this into his own... not-so-qualified hands.

"Um... are you okay?"

"What a stupid fucking question, no, obviously I am NOT okay." The (not) soft boy said from behind the hands that were covering his face, before sitting up straight quickly and shaking an inhaler that came out of nowhere, puffing on it desperately, "And I would really appreciate it if you could just leave me *alone*."

"Yeah, that doesn't sound like me," Richie said nonchalantly, shrugging his shoulders and earning a glare from the boy, "Cutest boy I've ever seen in my life having a panic attack and I'm just supposed to do nothing? Sounds fake, babe."

"What?" the boy gawked.

"I get your confusion. I know all about the stereotype that boys aren't usually in touch with their feelings, that they run away from anything real when it comes to stuff that happens in the brain but, trust me, I am not like other boys. I totally *naïl* emotions. *Trust me*."

"Unlikely."

“That’s fair. It’s hard to trust people. I don’t think I trust... anyone? I don’t know, I’d have to do some serious self-reflection and that’s not supposed to happen in *the waiting room* of the counselor, it’s supposed to happen in *the office* of the counselor, so I’ll wait a little until I have to do that, thank you very much. So, again, can I ask what happened? What triggered you? Did you not take the news that I’ve been having sex with your mom well?” The boy scoffed loudly and Richie cheered internally because that derisive smile was so much better than the blank confused stare he had been getting before. It was also better than the hyperventilating, that’s for sure.

“Wow, a *mom* joke? That’s amazing. I wonder, was it hard to build the time machine that took you fifteen years back so that you could get that joke from 2002 and bring it back here, to me?”

“It was all worth it to see you smile, cutie.” Richie retorted, actually making the boy chuckle, albeit reluctantly.

“You’re ridiculous.” Richie nodded in agreement and stared for probably a moment too long, because now the kid was actually smiling at him.

And it. Was. Disarming.

“What’s your name?” Richie asked. The boy hesitated for a long moment, staring at the laces of his shoes before looking Richie straight in the eyes again.

“I just fucking *know* that if I tell you, you’re gonna come up with some stupid ass nickname that’s going to drive me even more crazy than you already do.” Richie cracked up laughing and leaned forwards on his knees, getting as close to him as he could.

“That *wasn’t* my plan before but fuck all if it isn’t my plan now. *Please* tell me.”

“No.”

“I’m begging you.”

“No.”

"I'm not even that creative, I don't think I could come up with something all that good!"

"That's my fear, yes."

"Pleaaaaa-"

"Eddie Kaspbrak?" He was cut off by the counselor's voice, which was a gift from the Lord above, honestly because there was no one else in the room and *Richie's* name wasn't Eddie Kaspbrak sooo...

"Oh *fuck*, I was really hoping you'd get called first." Eddie whispered.

"Awww, Eddie Spaghetti, I think she needs you. I know it's hard to leave me but..."

"Ooh my God, that's even worse than I could've imagined." He snapped while he grabbed his bag off the floor and stood up to follow the woman.

"Oh come on, Eds, it isn't that bad."

"*Don't* call me Eds!" He threw over his shoulder before he disappeared behind the door, giving Richie one last smile.

"UGH, be still my heart." Richie muttered to himself, collapsing back into the seat behind him. He only got a moment to rest, thinking about his Eddie Spaghetti and *how* he was going to see him again, before his name was called out as well.

###

"I can't *believe* I got partnered with him." Stanley groaned, slamming his backpack down on the bench across from Eddie, Bill sliding in after him in a much softer manner.

"I was waiting for you to b-bring it up. It did not take l-l-long" Bill laughed.

"What? What happened?" Eddie asked, looking up from his phone where he was *not* re-reading a certain email he had yet to reply to. It was only Monday and he got it Saturday morning so... he had time.

“Stan got partnered with the new kid in AP Psych.” Bill said around a bite of apple.

“That’s bad? Who’s the new kid?” Eddie asked. He tossed Stan his hand sanitizer, knowing his friend liked to use it before he ate, just like Eddie did. They were kindred spirits in a lot of ways.

“You haven’t *heard* about him?” Stan asked, incredulous.

“No... it’s a big school, Stan.” Every kid in the *county* went to Derry High so even though the town may seem at times to be painfully small, Eddie definitely did *not* know every person. “You’re not talking about Ben, are you? I thought he was nice.”

“No-o. Not Ben,” Bill emphasized, “this guy is newer. And absolutely n-nothing like Ben.”

“*Nothing* like Ben.” Stan muttered, angrily unwrapping his sandwich.

“Wait, what’s wrong with him?”

“Nothing, really.”

“Everything.”

Eddie laughed at his friends’ simultaneous responses.

“I liked him. He w-was a little... out there. But n-nice, I swear.” Bill smiled at Stan who was glaring at him before he rolled his eyes to Eddie, face serious.

“He was a hot mess. Minus the hot part because *please*. He kept making jokes about my *mom*.”

“Wait, mom jokes? ... Tall, mess of black hair, giant glasses, never stops talking?” Eddie asked, almost choking on his bite of celery. Both Bill and Stan stared at him funny.

“Y-yeah, you know him?” Bill asked, a hint of a smile forming and *oh no that isn’t okay he isn’t allowed to know*.

Eddie was quiet for a moment.

“... No, I can't say I've met him.” Eddie said, shaking his head and taking another big bite of his food. Bill barked out a laugh and Stan just rolled his eyes fondly.

“You're r-ridiculous.” Bill said.

“Yeah, but still, let's assume you're telling the truth, which you *so aren't* for some reason, you probably never *will* meet him. Because I will most likely murder him at our study session this afternoon.” Stan took an angry bite of his sandwich and he may not have noticed, but Bill tensed up slightly next to him.

“S-study session?” Bill asked, trying to sound casual but pretty much missing that mark one-hundred percent, “just the t-two of you?”

“Yes. I know, it's very dangerous.” Stan agreed, oblivious as ever. Eddie fought not to roll his eyes.

“Why don't Bill and I come with you? I have stuff I have to work on and we can stop you from killing each other. Ease the tension a little bit.” Eddie had enough tension between Stan and Bill for a lifetime, he really didn't need anymore. But he didn't have to specify to Stan what he was talking about.

Sly was Eddie's middle name.

Oh also he was *not* doing this to see The Boy again. No sir. He had not in the past week found himself looking for curly black hair and wide brown eyes wherever he walked at school. Fuck no. He was just helping out Billy, who had a jealous streak a mile wide but for some reason.... Never did anything about it.

“Really? You guys would do that?” Stan sounded pretty touched.

“Of course!” Bill jumped in, “w-we care about your s-sanity, Stan.”

“Sanity? Never met her.”

2. Yet Lately I find There Is Pleasure In Humming a Silly Tune

Notes for the Chapter:

ENTER MORE LOSERS FOR ONE HOT SEC!! not all, not yet, but Mike will be here, he is written just... not yet.

honestly i wish i could write all of them together more but writing group scenes is hard!!!!

so i sneakily break them up and write them at different times sorry.

but yay here's the next chapter, thank you SO MUCH FOR READING!!!!!!

"I think I want to get high with Eddie." Richie said, mostly to himself, voice still hoarse as he blew out the rest of the sticky smoke in his lungs.

"Eddie Kaspbrak?" Bev asked as she grabbed the bong from Richie. She knew him?

"Yeah, you know him?" Richie let his head roll to the side so that he could watch her light the lighter and bring it to the bowl. The flame was just *really* nice to look at right now.

"Of course we know him," Ben added before Beverly leaned over to blow the rest of the smoke into his mouth, "We all went to middle school together." He said on his exhale.

"I'm sorry, can you guys *not* be cute while I'm sitting here alone thinking about a boy who is not here? You guys are shotgunning and I'm pining. Unfair." Richie objected but apparently he wasn't scary in Derry because the two of them just laughed before leaning back on the couch together. "Heterosexuality is gross."

"Hey, I am not hetero, I am *gay*." Beverly said, glaring at Richie

before rolling her eyes, “Ben just hates bongs. And he is also very cuddly when he’s high. AND I am a very good friend who graciously accepts cuddles. Anyway, you’re into *Eddie*?” Bev asked. Her eyes were really squinty and Richie wanted to laugh but he was too distracted by *Eddie*, cute light brown curls and a firecracker personality and soft pink blush. Richie liked him so. Much. Even though they had only talked to each other twice, once in the counselor’s office and then another time that very morning.

Richie had gotten to school early because he couldn’t sleep the night before anyway. He had depression-slept his way through the weekend, so Sunday night he was wide awake, practically bouncing off the walls.

Gotta love those highs and lows.

Which lead to him sitting under an elm tree in front of school an hour before school started, staring at the gray walls and high fences, struck with the irony of the fact that the school was literally built like a jail. He was pretty sure they locked the gates when school started? Like not just to keep people out, it was also to keep people in. Fucked up.

“I’ve never seen someone just stare at the school for so long. What could possibly be so interesting?”

Richie barely even heard someone walk up he was so out of it but when he looked up he couldn’t help but grin.

“Eddie!” Richie crowed happily, “You’re a sight for sore eyes.”

“Sore from staring at that fucking school or at yourself in the mirror?”

“Both. What are you doing here so early?”

“Oh, I just... I really wanted to see you.” Eddie deadpanned, shrugging his shoulders and Richie felt his draw drop.

“... You’re fucking with me.” Richie replied and Eddie stared at him blankly for a long moment before laughing.

“Yes, I’m fucking with you. How would I have known you’d be here?”

Eddie mused with a blinding smile, "Hey, I don't think I ever got your name."

"Oh, it's Richie. You want to sit?" Richie asked, sliding over to make room for him.

"Uh, thanks but I can't actually. I'm here to make up a chem test I missed last week. Fucking hate chemistry." Eddie explained, kicking the dirt at his feet.

"Could've fooled me." Richie teased.

"Why do you say that?" Eddie asked as he eyed him suspiciously.

"There's so much between us, I thought that you'd be an expert in it."

"You're a huge dork," Eddie rolled his eyes but Richie could see the faint blush on his cheeks, "How can someone who wears a shirt with little ducks on it have as much fucking confidence as you do?"

"A magician never reveals his secrets." Eddie laughed and rolled his eyes again.

"I gotta go now, but I'll see you around." Eddie said, starting to walk away.

"Yeah, see you around." And damn, Richie really hoped he would.

"Hated to see him go, but I loved to watch him leave." Richie sang to himself.

"What?" Bev giggled.

"Hmm? Sorry, I was staring at the ceiling and thinking about Eddie. Were you guys saying something?"

"We were just saying that we don't think Eddie is the kind of person who would smoke." Ben said for Bev since she couldn't stop laughing.

Apparently she got giggly when she got high. Ben just got sleepy and affectionate and Richie mostly got really philosophical. And horny but that was only with sativa and they were smoking indica. So he

was fine right now, no more impure thoughts than usual.

"I think I could get him to. I'm pretty sure he has a soft spot for me." Richie thought out loud.

"Wow, I didn't know Kaspbrak was *capable* of soft spots." Ben said as he rested his head on top of Beverly's.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Richie asked, snapping up in his seat. Were they insulting Eddie? Why would anyone do that?

"He's kind of uptight, Rich," Bev added, "I mean, he's cute as fuck and he seems really fun when he's with his friends but... he's not usually like that with... well, *anyone* besides Bill and Stan. And sometimes Ben but that's because everyone likes Ben." Aforementioned Ben just shrugged and didn't comment.

Richie leaned back against the couch, staring back at the ceiling of his garage again. Eddie wasn't like that with new people? He seemed pretty alright with him... or maybe he was reading all the signs wrong. Maybe what Richie thought was affectionate teasing was actually Eddie's signals that Richie should back the fuck off? But *Eddie* was the one who came up and talked to him that morning. He could've just walked on by, Richie wouldn't have even noticed.

But he didn't. He talked to him even if just for a second. And he didn't freak out at him at the counselors office...

"I think you guys have the wrong idea about him. You did know him in middle school, maybe he's changed."

"Maybe," Bev shrugged, staring at Richie like she trying to read him, "but you're thinking too hard. You're not supposed to smoke weed to *think*. Quite the opposite."

"Yes you're quite right, please, hand me the bong *madame*." Richie said in his best British accent which was... pretty good, if he had to say so himself.

"Oh my *God*, that was so bad, don't stop." Bev said through laughs and well, that reaction worked too.

###

"I'm going to kill him."

"He's *five* minutes late, Stan, I think you need to calm down." Eddie said, not looking up from what he was typing on his laptop.

"He's new in town, Stan, m-maybe he got lost?" Bill added to which Stan only replied with a disbelieving grunt. "You know, this p-project is only gonna suck w-worse if you go into this already hating him." Bill reasoned gently.

"I agree." Eddie added, "Maybe try to give him a second chance? First impressions sometimes aren't entirely accurate."

"Remember when *we* f-first met, Stan?" Bill asked, smiling smugly. Stan groaned and laughed.

"Yes, I *know*, I was the class gerbil-killer. I hate this story!"

"Everyone hated you, you killed Jorge. Unforgivable." Eddie added, trying not to laugh himself.

"Until Bill came along and saw me sitting alone and eating soup and said, *hey this kid seems okay. Maybe we should give him another chance.* And my life changed from that point on." Stan said dramatically, making Bill blush.

"Y-yeah, you had t-two whole friends." Bill rolled his eyes and Stan nudged his shoulder.

"Hey, that's all I need." Stan said... aaaaand then they stared into each other's eyes enough to make Eddie feel like he was invading on a private moment. That happened too much.

So he looked around the library instead and of course, saw Richie (yes, he had learned his name the day before. Richie, it fit him perfectly somehow, too old for a kid but too young for an adult at the same time) walk in...With Beverly Marsh, the prettiest and edgiest girl in school.

Eddie cleared his throat and tilted his head towards the front desk,

where Richie and Bev were.

“*Whoa*, what’s he doing with Bev Marsh?” Stan muttered, “She’s way cooler than him.”

“R-r-richie!” Bill loud-whispered, making the boy turn his head and smile widely. Eddie thought he had a nice smile, genuinely softening his face when it actually reached his eyes.

Richie said his goodbyes to Beverly, which involved gently pushing her out the door and flipping her off? Interesting relationship.

“Hey guys, I wasn’t expecting to see *all* of you here. Thought this was a just a date with me and Stanny.” Richie said, sliding into the seat next to Bill and across from Eddie.

“Call me that again and you’ll die.” Stan deadpanned, not looking up from his notes. The threat however did not have the desired effects and Richie just laughed, much to Stan’s dismay.

“You know, people usually *love* my nicknames,” Richie responded as he pulled his notebook out of his beat up backpack, “Isn’t that true, Eddie Spaghetti?” Eddie groaned loudly, trying to drown out Bill’s laughter as he dropped his head to the table.

“I was sort of hoping you wouldn’t remember that.” Eddie said, head still against the table.

“Oh please, like I could forget the day we *met*.” Eddie slowly raised his head from the table to find Richie grinning at him and Eddie decided it must be the boy’s permanent mission to make him blush.

“That is *actually* the best thing I’ve ever h-heard, Eddie. Even better than your m-mom calling you Eddie Bear.” Bill managed to say through his laughter.

“Eddie Bear!!!” Richie exclaimed, face full of joy.

“Oh, fuck you, *Billiam*!” Eddie elbowed Bill in the side, but the boy still laughed.

“Okay, can we calm down? We are in the library still.” Stan scolded,

but even *his* lips seemed to be fighting a smile. Eddie rolled his eyes and looked back at his laptop, still able to feel Richie watching him.

“All my friends are bullies.” He muttered, voice still fond, making Bill chuckle again before turning back to his own work.

“Okay, so did you have any topics in mind for our presentation?” Stan asked, all business. Eddie wanted to write his email, but it was hard to focus when he was nervous someone might look over at him and ask him what he was doing.

He hadn’t told them about his Pen Pal, even though it had been almost a year since he’d started writing them. It felt nice to have them to himself. If he told someone else about them, someone might judge them or think it’s weird or ask him to confront the confusing feelings he had about them. He wasn’t ready for that, so he kept them a secret.

But again, he couldn’t focus, so instead just listened to Stan and Richie.

“What’s the assignment?” Eddie asked.

“Oh, we have to pick a topic and teach a class about it later on in the semester. We have to have an outline of our proposed topic by Thursday. Which is tomorrow.” Stan explained as Richie nodded along.

“Yeah, I actually did the outline already, got bored in AP Lit so.” Richie shrugged and handed a sheet of paper to Stan, who looked down at incredulously.

“What.”

“Um, yeah, you can totally change whatever you want. It’s probably bad so... please change wherever you see fit. My idea was, and this might be verging a little too close to philosophy, but we could examine the personality and how that defines who we are, especially with how much it changes over the course of our lives. Particularly we could look at the guy Phineas Cage? The one who got the crowbar slammed through his skull?”

"I know of him." Stan said, still staring at the paper Richie gave him. He looked impressed and it made Eddie smile. Maybe Stan wouldn't hate Richie as much as he thought he would.

After that, their conversation got a little more into semantics and a lot less interesting, so Eddie decided it was time to write his letter.

Right as he was about to find his focus, he was snapped right back out when he heard Richie ask:

"Hey, what are you writing?" Eddie's stomach dropped and his mind scrambled for a lie but when he looked up with wide eyes, Richie was looking at Bill.

"Oh, just s-some drabbles. Eddie got me this daily p-prompt book for my birthday last year. So I try to write a little every day." Bill explained and Eddie smiled. Everything Bill said was so sincere and *wow* Eddie loved his friends so much.

"Interesting," Richie nodded, "What's today's prompt?"

"To write about a m-moment in my life that I wish had gone differently." Eddie could think of a few of those.

"Hell, I can think of quite a few of those." Richie said, making Eddie squint at him.

"You literally stole the words right from my mouth." Eddie responded. Richie nodded, seeming serene and understanding and Eddie just knew that meant he was going to say something stupid.

"Well, I feel like I just know you really well, Eds, considering *all* of your mom's pillow talk is about her Eddie Bear."

"You are so gross, shut the fuck up... and don't call me that." Eddie shook his head and looked back at his screen.

No distractions this time, just writing.

Hello darkness, my old friend,

I've come to talk to you again.

Wow I can't believe that is the first time either of us has made that joke, what the fuck.

*ANYWAY guess what I did this week. I binge watched all of the Scream movies and you were **wrong**. They are **not** as good as MTV's Scream: the TV series. Not **one** character in all of those movies is as interesting and iconic as Brooke Maddox. Or Audrey Jensen.*

And yes I think that Brooke and Audrey should be wives, but that is something you do not understand because you refuse to watch the show, you goddamn coward.

On a different and more serious note, I am seriously considering telling my friends about my condition. The other day, one of my best friends was telling me how embarrassed he was that he was still in speech therapy and I KNEW I could help him, i knew exactly how he was feeling but the words just stuck in my fucking throat. I literally couldn't say anything even though I knew it was the right thing to do.

It's just that I've built it up so big in my head that now it's something I don't think I'll ever be able to tackle. I can't make myself understand that it shouldn't be a big deal.

I was thinking about something you said last week, about how you thought that since we started talking to each other I've gotten more positive and I think that you might be right. In my day to day, casual life I am more positive and I generally worry less. I'm less anxious talking to people and I really am trying harder. But when it comes to the big things? I'm still as shitty at coping as ever. I still can't admit I'm sick out loud, I still can't go to bed without taking my pills, I still can't look at myself in the mirror and see anything but potential dangers but

*I can also smile and interact with my friends without constantly feeling **guilty** because I know that one day, I'll be able to tell them the truth, because I know that I am getting better. I actually do try to wake up and think positively about my day and that's because of advice that you gave me and I am just... really really grateful for that.*

I know I'm not one hundred percent better, but I said in that first letter

that I didn't think you would help me and I was wrong.

Yes, I may have done all the heavy lifting, but you really inspired me. So thank you.

Also, I had a conversation with this guy today who thinks that the world is flat, I shit you not. This is why God Doesn't Talk To Us Anymore.

Talk to you soon,

Me 102.0

p.s. I hope I've helped you as much as you've helped me.

Eddie smiled when he was done. Hitting send on these letters used to feel like this big event, but now it was easier. He didn't need to proofread 200 times like he used to so it was much nicer.

He looked up to see if his friends were done with their work and found all three of them staring at him expectedly.

"Um... whut?" Eddie asked, "Did I miss something?"

"Wow, you were really into your computer there, Eds. What were you looking at? PORN?" Richie accused, making Eddie roll his eyes again. For the 8000th time in the week that he had known him. Richie tried to grab for his computer fast, but Eddie pulled it back and shut it just as quick.

"Leave me alone, *no* I was not watching porn, you pervert. People don't watch porn in the *library*." Eddie gawked.

"Okay first off, everyone is watching porn in here." Richie said and honestly, Eddie KNEW that wasn't true but it still made him stare at all the people with computers suspiciously. And of course, Richie noticed and smiled widely, a smile that Eddie responded to with a scowl.

"And secondly, we were all gonna go get something to eat, you wanna come?"

“Oh yeah, I’m starved.”

“Huh, that’s funny, you’re hungry and your mom’s thirsty.”

“Excuse me?”

“Thirsty for my dick, am I right Eds?”

“..... *No*. No Richie, you are not right, shut the *fuck* about my mom, goddamn it. And don’t call me that, if you wanna keep your balls.”

“You preferred Eddie Spaghetti? I can jive with that.”

“Oh you can *jive* with that, grandpa? Is that right?”

“Oh for fucks sake this is the weirdest flirting I have ever seen.” Stan muttered to Bill as they all started to meander out of the building and the boy could only laugh and nod in response, watching Eddie and Richie bicker back and forth as if he was watching a tennis match.

The bickering persisted the whole way to the diner, Eddie just couldn’t resist arguing with Richie. Of course, the bickering was littered with actual conversation, but that wasn’t nearly as important.

When they got into the diner they chose a booth in the back, Eddie sitting across from Richie and next to Stan, Bill climbing in last. It was quiet for a moment while they looked around.

Bill reached across Richie to grab a pack of saltine crackers, splitting it with Stan. Richie watched them closely all the while.

“So,” Richie said after a long moment, “How long have you two been dating?” He asked, gesturing between Bill and Stan, the former of who immediately started choking on his cracker.

“Um, w-w-we aren’t d-dating.” Bill explained, wiping cracker of his face and avoiding Stan’s tomato red one.

“Oh. Could’ve fooled me.” Richie joked with an awkward chuckle and Eddie didn’t even shy from kicking him under the table, giving it all he got. “Owwwww.” He grimaced as he shook his head at Eddie in confusion.

“Um, Bill isn’t even gay. He’s straight.” Stan muttered. Richie turned his head to confirm with Bill, who looked up from his lap quickly.

“W-wait. I’m n-not straight.” Bill insisted, staring Stan straight in the eye for a long moment before shifting to Eddie, “Did I ever say I was straight?”

“You never said you were anything else.” Eddie said with a shrug.

“I f-f-fucking hate heteronormativity.” Bill groaned, “I am bisexual. There. I am out.”

The table was quiet for a moment.

“Good for you, Bill,” Stan said with a soft smile, “Now that that is taken care of, can we focus on food please?” Eddie nodded, jumping on the opportunity to shift from the awkwardness.

He was also really hungry.

“Yes *please*.”

“So, what are we ordering? You want to split something, Eds?” Richie asked as they all read over the menu.

“Never *ever*.” Eddie replied without looking up. He was *hungry*. And Eddie, without a doubt, was the kind of person who got *hangry* and he could definitely feel it coming on.

“Is there anything here that you think won’t be contaminated with bacon grease?” Stan asked quietly. Richie laughed.

“Would you *want* that if there was?”

“I’m Jewish.” Stan explained, rolling his eyes. Richie stopped laughing pretty fast.

“Ooohhhh. That’s fair. I would say that pasta is a good bet.”

A couple moments later, the waitress came to take their order and Eddie pretty much tuned out after that. He knew he should pay attention and try to contribute to the conversation, but he was too

hungry. To him it all sounded like this:

Stan said: “blah blah blah, blah blah, blahbbitly blah.”

Bill went: “Awww, blah blah, Stan, I’m secretly in love with you.”

Richie said: “BLAH BLAH BLAH NOT FUNNY JOKE BLAH BLAH”

And repeat.

And then the food came and Eddie felt a *lot* better.

“You’ve been quiet, Eds.” Richie said as he took a giant bite of his burger which was huge and practically almost gone. Eddie was mid-chew of his chicken so he held up a finger, but Bill spoke for him.

“Eddie gets hangry a lot. Tends to zone out until he eats when it happens.”

“It’s either deal with me being quiet or listen to me complain about everything. People tend to like it better when I’m quiet.” Eddie reasoned with a shrug.

“I don’t.” Richie disagreed with a soft smile and Eddie was kind of struck speechless by the sincerity.

“Yeah, *you* haven’t heard him complain.” Stan added with a teasing scoff, cutting off what could’ve been a nice moment, thanks Stanley.

“Fuck you Stan, you’re just as bad!” Eddie snapped back and they all started laughing and bickering again.

They talked good-naturedly until everyone was finished with their food and Eddie couldn’t help but find himself staring at Richie. He was just... *beautiful*.

He may not have been the most conventionally attractive guy, but that definitely didn’t stop Eddie from staring at his wild curls, his freckles, the way his hands were constantly moving, always playing with something, the way his eyes creased when he laughed, the way his red lips rested partly open while he listened attentively to other people talk, always ready to cut in with a witty remark.

He was just... *magnetic*.

That's why Eddie's hands were shaking a little bit when they were walking home just the two of them, Stan and Bill having stayed behind to try to beat Richie's high score at pinball.

"You okay Eds?" Richie asked, halfway through his speech about the difference between Pepsi and Coke.

"Hmm? Yeah, why?" Eddie tried his best to act casual and not reveal that he was just thinking about how he liked a boy. Gross.

"You're shaking. You cold? Here." Richie started to pull off the flannel he was wearing over his short sleeved black tee and Eddie tried to stop him.

"Oh, no, no it's totally okay, you don't have to do that!"

"Please, I insist. I run warm anyway, I'll be fine." He said with a grin and Eddie could hardly say no to that. Plus, the flannel was really warm and Eddie may not have been cold in his long sleeve pink shirt but it didn't hurt to have that extra warmth.

"Looks good on you."

"Shut up." Eddie muttered, chance at a good come eradicated by the fond look in Richie's eyes. "Come on, I gotta be home before curfew."

###

Richie had just made it back to his place and crashed on his bed when he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket.

*Text from Eds *heart eyes emoji* *ghost emoji* *underlined 100 emoji* *crying emoji* Kaspbrak*

Eds: I think I still have your flannel

Eds: I don't know why I said I think.. I definitely forgot to give you your flannel back

You: No worries, it looked better on you tbfh

Eds: Tbfh?

You: To be fucking honest

Eds: You cant just add fs to already existing abbreviations to make them more edgy

You: Y not

Eds: Idk you just can't

You: "Idfk you just can't" would've sounded cooler and edgier

Eds: Omfg

You: EY youre catching on

Eds: Bye im burning your flannel

You: NOOOO DON'T you look so cute in it don't

*Eds: *selfie of Eddie holding the flannel and a lighter, staring slightly off screen**

You: How did you even take that both hands are visible

Eds: Magic, babe

You: OMFG I'M YOUR BABE??

You: SO FUNNY THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT YOUR MOM CALLS ME

You: HER NAME USED TO BE BABE IN MY PHONE BUT NOW IM CHANGING YOU TO BE BABE INSTEAD

Eddie Babe: Blocking u bye

You: SEE YOU TOMORROW BABE WEAR MY FLANNEL PLS

Eddie Babe: New phone who dis :/

*You: Ded *broken heart emoji**

Richie collapsed back onto his pillows and laughed out loud. He couldn't stop smiling. He stared at his phone, hoping Eddie would text him back, but something in his gut said the conversation had come to a halt... and that wasn't okay with him.

So he called him.

"Richie? You're calling me? Is this 1989?" Eddie mocked.

"Ha! I knew you still had my number." Richie crowed as if that was his plan all along and he wasn't just desperate to keep talking.

"Oh right, sorry, new phone, whom dis?"

"Too late, you already gave your hand away, Kaspbrak."

"All right all right, what's up, Rich?" Eddie asked and oh. Yeah, Richie had to come up with a reason for calling. Because Eddie wasn't his boyfriend and they weren't even really that good of friends so he probably didn't yet have permission to just call whenever he wanted so...

"There's something I want to talk to you about." Richie adlibbed. *Come on, you're a good liar Tozier, step up.*

"Ohhhkay. What is it?" Eddie asked tentatively.

"I... think we should do something about Stan and Bill?"

"*What?*" Eddie sounded kind of shocked (and disappointed?).

"They're our friends, yours maybe a little more, but they're our friends and they would be so much happier together! We know that! And we knew they both like each other so why don't we just.... Give them a little nudge?"

"A nudge?"

"Yes. I have an idea. Of course I have an idea, I wouldn't have called you without thinking of a *plan* first." Richie insisted vehemently. Because that was... exactly what he did.

“Wait, isn’t this kind of messed up? It feels pretty manipulative.” Eddie reasoned and Richie could practically *hear* him thinking through the phone.

“Well, we won’t *make* them do anything. We can just try to help them see just how much they like each other, how much the other likes them, and then show them that the other won’t be single forever. They gotta move fast, you know?”

Was Richie still talking about Bill and Stan?

“Okay.... Yeah I guess that makes sense. I’ll... I’ll do it, but if it all goes up in flames I’m putting all of them blame on you with no remorse. So what’s your idea, hot shot?”

“Idea? *One*? No, Eddie, when kids have been repressing feelings like this for so long, it takes more than ONE STEP to get them to admit their love.”

“Fuck. How many steps are there going to *be*, trashmouth?”

“... let’s say ten.”

“That’s too many.”

“No it’s not. You can’t rush genius.”

“I think you’re underestimating Bill, honestly.”

“*Trust me*. That’s your problem, Eds. You don’t *trust*. I know what I’m doing, Eddie Bear, I am an expert. *So*, get yourself ready for my perfectly planned out, flawless *ten step plan* to get those two fuckers to admit they’re in love with each other. Step one: *Make Stan Jealous*.”

3. That is How I Am

Notes for the Chapter:

i am... nervous about this chapter.

Hope you like it!!! :D

Step One: Make Stan Jealous

"I don't understand why it has to be *me* who flirts with Bill. Why don't you? You're not the one who has known him since the *second grade*." Eddie said over the phone, complaining for the 80th time about this particular step.

"Because I flirt with everyone," something a little painful echoes in Eddie's stomach at that because yeah, he knew that and he knew that when Richie flirted with him it was probably nothing and that shouldn't matter but... it did, "So Stan wouldn't take it seriously. I mean I flirt with Bev for god's sake, and she is like Kinsey 6 gay." Richie scoffed.

"True. Yeah I guess that makes sense. UGH this is going to be *weird* as balls though."

"It might be. Hey, if it helps, just pretend Bill is me?"

"Why would making myself want to punch Bill in the fucking mouth make flirting any easier?"

"Shut up, you love me."

"Debatable. But I'll hate you less if this works."

"It will, trust me. So, Eddie Bear, do you have a plan of attack? Do you need help prepping?"

"I should be okay, thanks... Well, see you tomorrow, trashmouth."

"See you tomorrow, Spaghetti head."

“I fucking hate you.”

“Byeeeeeeee.”

Eddie rolled his eyes as he hung up the phone, still able to hear Richie even with the speaker away from his ear. He was about to go to bed, call it an early night so that he could get some rest before trying to figure out what the *fuck* he was going to fucking do to make *Stan* jealous.

Eddie *did not know how to flirt*. It was not a skill he honed in his repertoire. So he needed his rest. But, just as he was about to flip off his light, he heard a ding on his computer, which he had left open (with a sticky note over the camera, obviously, he didn't trust the NSA).

Anon82: hey did you know that there's a way to instant message on here? Any chance you wanna... talk?

What the fuck, that was his pen pal's email? They could... direct message each other? Why hadn't Dr. F mentioned that? Why hadn't they done that before???

You: Wow, no, I didn't know this existed. Kinda cool? Kinda think we should've been doing this a long time ago? Also yeah, I can talk. Is something wrong?

Anon82: Oh, no! Just wanted to... say hi? I know I haven't responded to your last email yet, really fucking sorry for that, I was about to, but then I saw this and I thought it might be easier.

Anon82: I'll still respond in big formal letter form but maybe we could also talk like this. I like this.

You: That could be nice. A little quicker responses.

Anon82: exactly. Um I also kind of wanted to say thank you to you for something...

You: for what?

Anon82: so I've actually... get ready for it

Anon82: made friends? I think that I partially have you to thank for that because in one letter I remember you saying that I would only make friends if I tried? and that's such a simple idea but I honestly don't even think I realized that I wasn't just not trying, I was negative trying. So I started to try... even a little bit. And I did it.

You: wow, that's awesome!!! I'm really happy for you.

Anon82: thanks :)

Anon82: Hey, did you know that tomorrow is national coming out day?

You: oh no, I didn't. that's pretty cool.

Anon82: yeah I thought so too... so we never said in our emails probably bc we don't know each other's genders but... are you gay or any kind of lgbtq?

Anon82: or r u like..... a homophobe

You: um not a homophobe. I'm not really sure what I am? Bi? Pan? Gay? Not sure?

You: definitely not sure and defs not straight

Anon82: that's fair.

Anon82: I'm bi ... jsyk

Anon82: are you out?

You: to my friends, yeah. To the school... I wouldn't say no if someone asked? But I Am Not out to my mom. Not yet. That is future me's problem.

Anon82: lol fair.

You: hbu?

Anon82: um, I would be out? If anyone asked? Like I hook up with both boys and girls so I am out to the ppl I hook up with? Sorta? Honestly there is just currently no one that I want to come out to. No one I could tell that

would make me... out. So in my head, yes. I am out.

You: hey, you have me. So after this conversation you are Officially Out.

You: congrats. Wish I could give you a cake.

You: with lots of rainbow sprinkles

Anon82: ew no miss me with that gay shit thanks

Anon82: fuck that was a joke

You: yeah lol I know

You: I know we were brought together by therapy but you don't have act like they're watching us. We can engage in colloquial jokes together.

Anon82: omfg I wonder if they are..... I wouldn't put it past them to monitor us

You: paranoid much

Anon82: NO WHY DO YOU ASK????

Anon82: jk

You: So, this is random but can I ask you a question I need... sort of immediate advice about?

Anon82: hit me.

You: kinky

Anon82: lolololol but not for real what's up?

You: How do you... find confidence? Like if you have to do something that... isn't really in your comfort zone. What would you recommend?

Anon82: hmm... is alcohol an option?

You: lmao no

Anon82: bummer okay well... honestly there isn't much that is out of my

comfort zone. That's one of my few good qualities, I think, but in my very much skewed opinion? People don't do things out of their comfort zone only because they're scared. And fear... fear isn't something you wanna let control you. Life's too short, you know?

Anon82: so just... go for it. Give it all you've got, babe.

Anon82: and with how much thinking I know you are capable of doing.... You've got a lot to give.

You: wow. That ... actually helped me. I think I know what I'm gonna do now

You: thank you.

You: I'm really glad you messaged me

Anon82: of course. :)

You: anything I can try to help YOU with, even tonight's score?

Anon82: got any tricks for insomnia?

You: to cause it or get rid of it?

Anon82: lmfao to get rid of it

*You: tbh yeah actually you came to **exactly** the right person*

###

“Hey Bill!” Eddie said cheerfully, bounding over to where his friend was sitting and writing beneath one of the big elm trees in front of the school. He could see Richie, Stan, and Bev from where he was standing, but knew Bill couldn't, his back to them.

“Hey, Eddie. You seem happy today.” Bill smiled up at him, squinting to see past the sun. Eddie sat down in front of him so he wouldn't blind him. He crossed his legs, moving forward enough that his knees were just touching Bill's.

“Yeah, I am. Did you know that today is national coming out day?”

Eddie asked. Bill raised an eyebrow and shook his head.

"No I d-didn't. Derry isn't really the p-place that would love that." Bill shrugged.

"I know that and that's why I wasn't really planning on... doing anything, but then I thought *fuck it*, you know? Life's too short. Can't be afraid all the time." He said, smiling widely. Bill looked impressed and nodded.

"That's really brave, Eddie."

"Oh please, you've *always* been the brave one, Bill," Eddie said, leaning forward slightly and trying to turn it on, "I'm just following in your footsteps." Bill flushed red and laughed, looking at Eddie kind of incredulously and *yeah* Eddie wanted to laugh too but. No. He was on a roll.

"So, I brought these paints and I was thinking that anyone of us who *wanna* could wear some cute rainbow designs on them today to commemorate the occasion. You interested?" Eddie *did* not bat his eyelashes because he knew that would be tacky, but if he tried to open his eyes a little wider and push out his bottom lip a little bit, who cares, because after a few long seconds of staring at his friend, Bill agreed.

"Only if y-you paint it for me." Bill said, leaning forward on his elbows, mirroring Eddie and *oh my God he was flirting back? Is that what he was doing? Jesus fucking Christ.*

"Of course!" Eddie, kind of high off the adrenaline, grabbed Bill's legs and pulled them out of the crossed position, instead moving him so that Eddie could slide in between his legs, getting as close as possible. "How could you paint your own face?" Eddie explained, *reveling* in the blush that stained his friend's cheeks as well as the stares that he could feel he was getting from the three behind Bill's shoulder.

Eddie went to grab the paints from his bag, grabbing the red and a small brush.

"W-wait," Bill said, grabbing Eddie's hand, "You're going to p-paint

in that? Isn't that a new sweater?" Eddie looked down at his clothes, the new white cable-knit sweater that was underneath a pair of overalls.

"Aw, you noticed. That's sweet. And nah, it's okay. I have good control, don't worry." Eddie assured him, *actually winking* before pulling his hand back from Bill to grab the brush again.

"I'll do a heart, yeah? And then fill it in with the rainbow so it's *extra* gay." Eddie said, making Bill laugh.

"Sounds good." Bill settled back and Eddie leaned in. Aaaaand, just as he started drawing the heart he felt Bill's hand *resting on his hip*.

And then *immediately* he heard Richie's voice above them, a little more strained than usual, he might add.

###

"Um, what... the *fuck* is going on over here? This looks like the beginning of a porno." Richie barked. He knew we was probably talking too loud but he had to, in order to hear his own voice over the rushing in his ears because *oh my GOD EDDIE WAS IN BILL'S LAP. AND LEANING CLOSE TO HIS FACE.*

Eddie looked up at him with a smug smile and Richie was pretty sure that smile could kill a man. Him. In particular. It could kill him, death due to sexual and emotional confusion.

"I'm painting Bill's face, for National Coming Out Day? I think Derry needs a little more LGBTQ support, and after our conversation at lunch the other day, I thought our little group would be the perfect ones to provide it." Eddie shrugged before turning back to Bill.

Which was so *not what he wanted to happen*.

He honestly wasn't sure who was more jealous, him or Stan. Okay... probably Stan, who was staring back and forth between his two friends with complete confusion written all over his face. Because well, *he* didn't know this was all a plan to get them to realize they like each other.

“Fuck yeah, I’m in.” Bev said, dropping down next to Bill and grabbing some paints for herself and the friend, Mike, she had brought over with her. Stan stared at her for a second before quickly going to back to Bill.

“S-stan, you should do it too.” Bill smiled at him and gestured = -** for him to sit down in the grass next to them. Stan walked towards them slowly.

“Yeah, Stan, I can do you after Bill if you like-”

“No!” Bill cut off Eddie’s offer quickly and everyone stared at him (except Richie who was, of course, still watching Eddie who was *still* in Bill’s lap), “I j-just wanna do one. Is that o-okay?”

“Fine with me! I’ll just do Richie’s next.” Eddie shrugged, “Almost done with yours, by the way. Just... one more thing.”

“Oh but, you only did t-three colors?” Bill asked, looking at the paint Eddie had grabbed.

“Well I did the bisexual flag instead, pink, blue and purple? Thought it was more fitting.” Eddie explained as he pointed to a... bright pink lipstick from Bev’s bag?

“Mind if I borrow this?” Eddie asked her sweetly. She laughed and nodded.

“Not at all, babe.” Bev answered and Eddie looked a little surprised at her for a second before shaking it off and turning back to Bill and grabbing the tube of lipstick.

Richie balked.

“Um, Eds, as good as I think that would look on *you*, I don’t think Bill could pull it off.” Richie chuckled, really wondering when the *fuck* this situation, *his plan*, got so out of his hands.

Probably the moment he involved Eddie Spaghetti in the first place. Never underestimate a boy with pretty eyes. *Rule one, Tozier.*

“Richie, please, he’s not going to wear it,” he said, untwisting the cap

before turning around to look at Richie, "But you *really* think it would look good on me?" Right after asking, he ran the pink end over his bottom lip, effectively shutting Richie and whatever response he could've managed *the fuck up*.

After applying it pretty impressively to his lips, Eddie turned around and placed a firm kiss on Bill's cheek, pulling back eventually to admire the perfect outline of his lips that it had left on the boy's cheek.

"Perfect," Eds remarked, "*Don't* rub it off." He scolded, before standing up and grabbing his paints to turn to Richie.

"Um, what the fuck?" Stan squeaked, "Literally did I *miss* something between you two?" his voice was at least two octaves higher than usual and *yeah* Richie could relate.

"Eddie, can I *speak to you for a second?*" Richie said as calmly as he could because WOW this had gotten out of hand. Eddie shrugged and started to walk away but Bill was still staring up at him with an expression Richie couldn't really read.

The two of them were about to walk away so Richie could figure what when where why and how that just happened, when he noticed a sudden change in Bill.

"Don't worry, S-Stan. There's nothing going on with me and Eddie. He... isn't the one I want a kiss from." He said, staring directly at Stan. Then, he looked around, settled on the bright pink lipstick and picked it up, handing it to Stan with a wide smile.

Stan looked down at it for a long second before grabbing it angrily.

"You're *kidding* me, right?" Stan asked and Eddie and Richie looked at each other nervously.

"Umm..." Bill muttered.

"After *all these years this is how you ask me out, you fucking IDIOT!*" he yelled before pulling Bill in close by his collar and kissing the look of confusion right off his face.

Eddie turned to Richie with a wide grin.

“*One fucking step.*” Eddie whispered, sweeping his arms wide and bowing deep. Richie laughed loudly. When he looked over and saw the two boys were still making out, he grabbed Eddie’s hand to drag him away so they could give them some privacy, gesturing for Bev and Mike to follow.

“What the *fuck* is up with your friends?” Richie could hear Mike asking Bev, who just laughed and smiled.

“I have no idea, I don’t really know them that well.”

“Well they are a wild fucking ride, I like them.”

“Same.” Bev laughed.

“I’m Mike, by the way.” He said, turning to Eddie and introducing himself as they all sat down.

“Yeah, nice to meet you. I think we have gym together? Third period?” Eddie said, shaking Mike’s extended hand.

“Oh, sure... Sorry, I’m never in that class because Bev and Ben like to ditch third period, and now Richie too so. I’m usually dragged along with them.” Mike explained, making Richie smile.

It was a weird experience to have a group of friends now. It really only started with Bev, who was probably the coolest person he ever met and she didn’t even *try*. And she brought Ben with her everywhere who was a sweet kid. He also had a habit of dropping *mad wisdom* at random points in conversation when Richie actually really needed to hear it.

“You guys been friends for a while?” Eddie asked.

“Just since freshman year, I was homeschooled before that. But before I hit my growth spurt, Bowers and his gang liked to take out their racist anger on me. Bev and Ben found them cornering me behind the supermarket one day after school and Bev actually *tasered the fucker*.” Mike explained with a laugh, “I knew then I couldn’t *not* be friends with her.”

“What the fuck, you carry a *taser* Bev?” Eddie barked.

“Um, yes, obviously, that is not hard to believe. Bev is a badass,” Richie added on, “But this is a blatant change of subject and I want to go back to what just happened... So um... what the fuck just happened? What were you *doing* back there, Kaspbrak?” Eddie looked at him with wide eyes.

“Um, I was flirting with Bill. Like YOU told me too.” Eddie said, pointing the paint brush at Richie accusatorily.

“Yeah, well, you did it a little too well, *fuck*, where did you *learn* that?”

“I don’t know, movies?” Eddie shrugged.

“What kind of movies are you watching? *Jesus*.”

“Wait, are you seriously mad at me? I was just doing what YOU told me to do, I don’t understa-”

“Wait,” Bev cut in, looking confused, “What’s going on? You *told* him to do that, Richie?”

“Oh, yeah,” Eddie said, turning to Bev next to him, “Bill and Stan have been in love with each other ... well, *forever* but they were super oblivious and too chicken shit to tell each other anything, so Richie came up with a ten fucking step plan to get them to admit their love for each other, and I only needed *one* of his steps to do it. Because I am better than him.”

“Okay, enough with the goddamn smugness, all right?” Richie laughed and Eddie just rolled his eyes fondly.

“Wow, that’s some shady shit,” Mike added, “So... whose going to do that same thing for you too? Should we, Bev? Do you think we should draft a plan?”

“Um, *what*?” Eddie asked over Beverly’s giggles. Mike just rolled his eyes and smiled.

“You guys like each other right? I mean shit, you should’ve seen your

boy's face when you were in Denbrough's lap earlier. I was expecting a *fight*." Mike explained and Eddie seemed at a loss for words which was... understandable if a little dim.

Eddie *had to know* how much Richie liked him, right? The only other person Richie had *actually* ever liked as much as Eddie was the Email Kid and that was... so different. The two of them had gotten to *seriously* personal levels. He hadn't gotten even *near* that level of intimacy with Eddie and he still felt as strong of a connection to him.

He'd also never even heard that person's voice or seen what they look like when they laugh or watched them use an inhaler or seen them get hangry. Instead, he was *so far gone* on *Eddie*... because he was right here in front of him and like... perfect.

Yes, maybe he had a really personal and emotional connection with the Email Kid but, that wasn't realistic. Eddie was everything that Kid was and more.

Hell, there were times where Richie kind of blurred the two together in his mind, the two were so similar. He definitely had a type.

"Um... he-he is not my boy." Eddie stuttered. Richie felt himself smile in response but it didn't change the fact that he could feel his stomach in his shoes.

(Fun Fact: smiling had grown to be Richie's default response to awful things happening to him. He never smiled or laughed more than in a therapy session or when his parents decided they were going to spend that night yelling about Richie and all he's done to disappoint them. Defense mechanisms were awesome.)

Bev stared in between them suspiciously and Richie got that feeling he got with her so much even in only the last week he'd known her: *that she just knew everything*.

"You so sure about that?" Bev asked Eddie, eyes never leaving Richie's. Eddie whipped his head around to look at Richie so fast it was almost comical, his eyes wide and mouth slightly open in shock, or maybe like he was about to say something.

Luckily they were both literally saved by the bell as a loud ringing echoed, signaling the start of the day. Richie jumped out of his seat and grabbed his bag, making some excuse about his class being across campus and running off.

He knew his friends were staring at his back as he made his cowardly escape, but the thing was, he knew he wasn't good enough for Eddie. He knew his crush was useless because Eddie was funny and smart and beautiful and he cared so fucking much about all of his friends and he just cared so much in general that he was way out of Richie's leagues.

Not that Eddie would even be the kind of guy who subscribed to the idea of leagues, he was so good.

But of course he didn't like him, Richie knew that. But those moments where they fought? Where their conversations drifted from friendly to flirty? When Richie thought he might've pushed things too far but Eddie pushed right fucking back? Those were his favorite.

He may have only known him for a very short amount of time but, Eddie was so much. Being with him meant so much to Richie and *no way* could he stand rejection from him. It would hurt too much.

"Richie, *wait!*" He heard Eddie call out behind him and if it had been anyone else, he wouldn't have stopped. But man, it was hard to not listen to Eddie.

"Eds, you really don't have to do this, I get it-"

"No, just shut the fuck up for once and let me talk," Eddie snapped, looking out of breath (he was pretty short and Richie did tend to walk fast even for tall people so he probably did have to walk fast), "I like you. A lot."

Richie felt his jaw drop. Was he hearing things?

"I-"

"*No seriously* stop fucking talking. I need to tell you this because a really important person recently told me to stop letting fear rule my life. So... I really like you and I do want to be with you. But there's

something I have to do first. Something that might change things between us, but I have to do it because if I don't I will always wonder and that wouldn't be fair to you and I really like you. I know it's only been like three minutes that we've known each other and it sounds fucking gay as shit, but I feel like I've known you for a lot longer than that. This feels... good and I don't want to lose you but. I need to be sure... Is that okay?"

Richie stared for a moment, mind struggling to keep up with all that he just heard. Something he needed to do? Was there...

"Is there someone else?"

"Something like that," Eddie admitted after a moment of thought, grimacing slightly, "Can we meet tomorrow? I can come over to your place or we could meet at the barrens or the café or—"

"Let's do the barrens," Saturday mornings weren't always pretty at Richie's house, "Does noon work?"

"Yeah. Thanks, Richie... you're not... mad at me?" Eddie asked and Richie wanted to fucking cry Eddie was so cute. There was a slight blush staining his tan cheeks and he was staring down at his shoes, his crazy long eyelashes emphasized. Richie laughed a little to stop from falling to his knees and begging Eddie to choose him.

"Honestly, Eds? This is more than... I ever thought I would get with you. I could never be mad at you. I'll take anything you wanna give, whether that makes us acquaintances or friends or best friends or ... boyfriends. I just want you to be happy." Richie said, breath leaving him in a huff at the end.

Eddie stared up at him with those big fucking brown eyes before pulling him close, squishing them together in the tightest hug Richie had *ever* been given.

"Oh jeez, Eds, I can't breathe." Richie wheezed, but returned the hug nonetheless, resting his chin on Eddie's head and trying to be as subtle as he could as he let the smell of Eddie fill his head.

"Thank you Richie." Eddie whispered. After a long moment, he

pulled back, grabbing his bag and looking around at the stragglers who were still running off to class late.

“I’ll see you at lunch?” Richie asked, messing with the straps of his backpack to get some nerves out.

“Oh, actually I won’t be at lunch. Um, my counselor is out this afternoon so she asked if I could come at lunch? And I really wanted to get a session in today, so.” Eddie admitted.

“Oh, I totally understand. I wouldn’t wanna miss a week either. I’ll see you tomorrow then.” Tomorrow, when he would tell him whether or not he liked some other person more than him.

Cool. Cool cool cool cool cool cool cool. No doubt no doubt no doubt.

“Tomorrow,” Eddie said, smiling softly and starting to walk to class, “Oh and um... could you not tell everyone where I’m at for lunch? I don’t really like to talk to them about... that kind of thing.”

Okay well okay that is weird. That sounded *exactly* like something Email Kid would say...

“Not a problem, Eddie Spaghetti. My lips are sealed, babe.” Richie winked before turning around and walking to class himself, but not before noticing the wide-eyed look his friend got at his words.

Did he say something wrong?

###

Why did people keep calling him babe all of the sudden and make everything confusing? First Bev and now Richie? Richie of all people?

Eddie could *not* hear the word and babe and not think about his pen pal.

It was stupid anyway, what are the chances that anyone he knew would be his pen pal? Dr. F said that the program spanned over all of the Northeastern United States. His person probably lived in... Delaware or something, knowing his luck.

But, he still had to talk to them, see if... anything was possible between them. Because he'd been falling in love with his pen pal for so long, had such a strong connection with them that he wasn't ready to give it up, just yet. He had to see if something was there.

So he was going to ask them to FaceTime tonight.

And he might die of nervousness.

"So, did you skip lunch because you didn't want to face the questions I was inevitably going to ask you about what the fuck that was this morning?" Stan's voice sounded over the phone before Eddie could even get out a greeting.

"Awww *fuck* man, I'm sorry, I meant to call and apologize? It was kind of a petty thing to do and I may have gone... a little overboard. Are you mad at me?"

"No, I'm not mad. I know that even though it was weird, it was coming from an ill-advised place of love." Stan admitted with a chuckle, "And I wanted to personally let you know that Bill and I are officially official."

"Yayyy!" Eddie cheered, grateful for the temporary distraction from his own love life... fuck how weird, he had his own love life, "I'm glad for you two."

"Thanks, Eddie. I was actually calling to make sure you were okay... since you weren't at lunch." Stan said. He sounded like he was choosing his words pretty carefully. Eddie tried to be casual about it.

"Oh, thanks, Stan, but I'm totally okay. Just had to stay behind at Mrs. Appleton's class, talk to her about the last in class essay." Eddie lied, pretty impressed with himself actually.

"Hm, yeah that's what Richie told us," wow, what they had come up with the same lie? Remarkable, "And, forgive me for this, maybe it's just because I don't trust trashmouth but... it seemed like a lie. Still kinda does, Eddie."

"What do you mean?" Eddie asked cautiously.

“Nothing, Eddie. I trust you, I do, just I want you to know that you can talk to us, me and Bill and even Richie, about anything. We love you and if there’s anything wrong, we want you to know we’re here for you.”

“Wow. Thanks, Stan. I ... thanks.” Eddie breathed, kind of caught off guard. He didn’t realize how much Stan noticed.

“You’re welcome. Oh, also, Richie is *totally* in to you. You know that right? I guess if you don’t I could... climb in his lap? See how that makes you feel?” Eddie barked out a laugh and was immediately filled with affection for his friend.

“You see, I’m glad we can already laugh about this. And I do know. I do and I am... working on it.”

“Okay. Well, I know I give him a lot of shit and I stand by my opinion that he is an annoying mother fucker and *don’t you dare tell him I fucking said this*, but he’s also a good guy. And he’s Different around you. In a good way.”

“You think so?” Eddie asked. This conversation was a lot more intense than he expected, he was really struggling to keep up.

“Definitely. So I reluctantly give my approval if you decide to date him. Are you going to date him?” Stan asked bluntly and Eddie sighed.

“I’m not sure. It’s complicated.”

“How?” Stan pushed, “You like him, right?”

“Yes, I do but... there is kind of someone else.”

“What the *fuck*? Who? Do I know him... or her?”

“No. I don’t even really know them? Fuck... I met them through this pen pal thing I do? It’s an anonymous internet thing that my counselor signed me up for like a year ago and ... I really like them. But the thing is, I’ve never met them. I mean, I *know them*. I’ve shared a lot with them and honestly, I’m falling for them. Have been for a while and I know that it isn’t fair to Richie if I start a relationship

with him with residual feelings for this person who is literally just a dream to me, this idealized fantasy perfect dream that I need to come to terms with before I ... start a relationship.” Eddie took a deep breath when he finished, kind of surprised at himself.

He hadn’t even told Dr. F that.

“Wow. That was not expected. But I completely agree with you. I think you owe it to you, Richie, and this person to tell them the truth and talk to them face to face.” Stan reasoned and Eddie felt like a weight was lifted from his shoulders.

“Really? You agree with me?”

“Of course, Eddie,” Stan said with a laugh, “We usually see eye to eye on things, you know? It’s not a wild notion that I agree with your line of reasoning.”

“I know, I know. I just get... anxious a lot.”

“It’s probably a part of your anxiety disorder.”

“Oh... yeah. That.” Eddie gulped. He could practically hear Stan’s comforting smile over the phone.

“If you ever want to talk about it, I’m here. You know, me and Bill have had our fair share of fights with mental illnesses so. I don’t wanna brag but, I know a modicum of things.”

“Wow, tone down the ego, Stanley, thanks,” Eddie said, making them both laugh, “But again, thanks. For everything.”

“You’re welcome. And lastly, just so you know, I’m pretty sure Bill has a crush on you now. So if it doesn’t work out with Richie, you are welcome to join me and Bill and we can be a thrupple.” Stan said, making Eddie laugh out loud.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Bye Eddie.”

“Bye Stan.”

They both hung up and Eddie felt a lot better after their conversation. Suddenly it was much easier than he thought it would be to type out:

You: hey you wanna talk? I need to ask you something.

###

Anon11: hey you wanna talk? I need to ask you something.

Richie hopped off his bed when he heard his laptop ding through the episode of Parks and Rec that he was playing, seeing the message from Email Kid.

You: yeah sure. What's up?

Anon11: would you be willing to facetime? I know its against the rules but Fuck the Rules

Whoa. Facetime? They had never even considered doing that before. Well, not on paper at least. Richie had thought of asking for a long time but... he was kind of one hundred percent under the impression that Email Kid didn't want to ever make this thing between them real. It had helped them both being anonymous and they were both afraid to damage that.

But yeah, he was a rebel, fuck rules.

You: YEAH let's do it! Can I ask what made you want to, though?

It was a big gap of time before he got a response.

Anon11: I'm done letting fear control me. Like you said.

Anon11: before I give you my number, I gotta ask, it's stupid, I know but... are you a girl or a boy? I just wanna be... slightly prepared.

You: lmfao me is a boy

Anon11: oh okay. Me too. So...

You: so...

Anon11: are you gonna do it... or...

You: you didn't give me your number

Anon11: OASKDNAIFGLJ

Anon11: im embarrassed

Anon11: um yeah its 201-555-2145

Richie typed the number into his keypad and-

He fucking knew it.

You: wait that's the right number?

You: you're positive?

Anon11: um yeah??? Why???

You: ummm..... um.

###

*Incoming FaceTime from Richie *Turkey emoji* *Fire Emoji* *Tongue emoji* *Rolling Eyes emoji* Tozier*

Eddie looked at his screen and frowned. Not what he was expecting and *honestly* really bad timing.

"Your timing could not be worse." Eddie said as Richie's face became progressively less blurry. He kind of looked like he'd seen a ghost, now that his face was cleared... it was still a stupidly cute face, though, with all the freckles and the cheekbones and... wow that's not the point, stop staring, Eddie, "What's up Richie? I'm waiting for a call."

"Um, I know you are, Eds."

"Don't call me that. What are you talking about?"

".... I'm the call you're waiting for. I am... anon82."

Richie stared at him, waiting for him to say something but Eddie was... speechless.

It made sense? He supposed it made sense but.....

“WHAT?” Eddie managed after a long moment of silence, and Richie grimaced on the screen.

“Are you mad?” Richie asked, face looking sorry and wait-

“Did you *know*?” Eddie asked. That was the only way he would be mad, if Richie had known this WHOLE time and didn’t tell Eddie just to make him look like an idiot.

God that would be so fucking embarrassing.

“No! I didn’t know until I typed your number into my phone... I mean I suspected? There were times where I thought ‘hey Eddie kind of reminds me of that person I email’ but I never would have ever thought that of ALL the people it would be you, I mean that’s a fucking small world, what are the chances of that? Less than my chances of marrying Blake Lively, and let me tell you, that is a very small number because she is *perfect* and-”

“Richie,” Eddie cut him off, “you’re rambling.” Richie nodded his head in acknowledgment and tried to take a deep breath.

“You’re right. I’m sorry, you talk.”

What was he supposed to say? This was all... pretty surprising but really, wasn’t it good news? Yes, it was kind of weird to know that *Richie* is the one he’d been divulging all of his pretty deep secrets to, but he’d proven time and time again that he was a good guy, over email and in person.

Was there a down side to this outcome?

“Well... all I really have to say is that this makes my problems seem pretty dumb.”

“What?” Richie asked and Eddie groaned, covering his face with his free hand.

“*For fucks sake*, I was fretting over whether or not I was going to choose you... over you.” Eddie said, feeling hysterical laughter

bubbling in his chest, both from happiness and just confused adrenaline.

“Oh yeah... huh, you look pretty stupid now, babe.” Eddie rolled his eyes, making Richie laugh.

“I fucking hate you but... it’s also nice to hear you call me that out loud.”

“OH MY GOD THAT’S SO GAY KASPBRAK!”

“Keep it up and I’m not going to choose you at all, I’ll go date Bill and Stan and instead.” Richie looked at him blankly for a long moment until Eddie broke down and started laughing.

“Oh bite me.”

“So we still on for our date tomorrow? I have to let you know my final decision.”

“Spoiler alert: it’s me.”

“We’ll see.”

“Yeah, we’re still on. See you at noon, babe.”

“See you at noon.” They both smiled at each other for a long moment before Richie got the trademark shady look in his eyes.

“Orrrrrr I could come over now?”

“Richie, it’s *nine o’clock*, there’s no way my mom will be okay with me having a friend over this late.”

“It’s *fine*, she’s expecting me over soon anyway.”

“Joking about fucking my mom already? We haven’t even been dating for 20 minutes.” Eddie teased, barely able to contain his smile because Richie was smiling *so wide*.

“We’re dating then?” Richie asked.

“Shut up. You can’t come over.”

“Yes I can. And your mom doesn’t have to know. I’ll climb in your window, Juliet.” Richie said with a shrug and a sly look in his eye, “I’ll be there in twenty. DON’T go to sleep.”

“Wait, Richie, what-” The screen cut out before Eddie could get any response, but he wasn’t really mad.

He flopped back onto his bed and couldn’t help but grin. He’d really hoped it would be Richie.

Notes for the Chapter:

i might do an epilogue idek

thanks for reading :) this was my first reddie fic (and just my first time being inspired to write in a really long time) and i love them so much, this was really fun to write!!

4. Morning and Evening I Live in my Usual Way

Notes for the Chapter:

I WROTE AN EPILOGUE OF SORTS... really its just another chapter that I wanted to write bc i wanted to write them dating and also I wanted to write them all being friends so... yeah :D

“Why did you even *bring* that? To *my* home?”

“Mike, everyone loves Root Beer. It is an American classic. Which is more than I can say about whatever the fuck *that* is.”

“Oh, now you don’t know what *Sprite* is? And root beer is not an American classic, cherry coke is the American classic! Root beer is just gross and Sprite is way more refreshing. It wins in every category.”

“You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.”

“YOU don’t know what the fuck *you’re* talking about!”

“Damn, Eds, your boyfriend can argue about anything.” Ben said with a laugh from where he was sitting with Eddie on the couch, watching Mike and Richie go at it.

“I feel obligated to defend him and say that Mike is antagonizing him.” Eddie defended, although that subsequent rolling of his eyes weakened the defense slightly.

“I resent that.” Mike pointed at him for emphasis but came and sat next to them anyway. Not before he pointedly grabbed a can of sprite, though. “Are Bev and Bill almost here?”

“Yeah, they said they were leaving the pizza place about fifteen minutes ago so they should be here soon.” Stan said. Eddie hadn’t even known he was awake, since the boy had been napping on Mike’s couch for the past 20 minutes.

“*Oh*, good morning sleepy head.” Eddie teased. Stan levelled him

with a glare.

“Shut up. You’re the one who told me to watch Fringe. I blame *you* for me not being able to do anything but binge watch it. Even when I should be sleeping.” Eddie’s responding laugh was cut off when he felt his boyfriend plop into his lap.

“Eds, you like root beer more than sprite, right?”

“Wow, you’re *still* on that?” Mike groaned.

“I prefer vanilla coke, actually.” Eddie replied, making both boys gasp dramatically.

“I’m dating a crazy motherfucker,” Richie groaned, somehow managing to spread himself out more over Eddie, “He’s *crazy!*”

“Is Richie talking in third person again?” Bill said as he walked in, carrying five large pizzas boxes. They needed a lot of food, because, despite her size, Bev alone usually ate one whole pizza herself. Then of course, Richie and Mike literally never stopped eating, so they needed a lot.

“FOOD!” Richie yelled the war cry and they clambered off the couches to grab food.

It was nice to hang out, all of them together. Ever since Richie and Eddie started dating, the two of their groups had merged together pretty perfectly. They ate lunch together every day and the classes Eddie used to be all alone in, he now had Bev or Ben or Mike. It was nice.

They usually all met up at the quarry or Bill’s house, but Mike’s uncle had just let him move into the cellar which was much bigger and had its own TV and fridge.

And Mike’s uncle was away for the weekend, so the closest thing they had to actual supervision was Stan.

After everyone got food, they all piled on and around the couch so that they could settle in and watch movies. Of course, there was a vicious argument about which one to start with, but Richie made a

strong case for The Goonies and when Richie argued for something, he most definitely got it. He probably definitely should be on the debate team.

So that was why Eddie thought it was weird when halfway through the movie he realized Richie hadn't made one joke since the first sequence. He had actually been pretty still and calm, and Eddie should know since he was sitting in his lap.

Eddie looked up at Richie and saw him staring just to the side of the TV, face totally blank. And that... wasn't good.

"Richie, you okay?" Eddie forced himself to whisper. Richie's eyes snapped towards Eddie, looking shocked and shaking his head a little.

"Yeah, I'm fine." He replied, squeezing Eddie's hand a little, but he wasn't convinced. Richie was still tense and his leg was now tapping incessantly.

Eddie weighed his options. The tricky thing was, Eddie *knew* Richie. He knew a lot, probably more than he should know about a boy he had only been dating for two weeks, and they hadn't talked about it yet. He and Richie had yet to address the elephant in the room that they were both well aware of the other's deepest darkest secrets.

And one of those secrets was that Richie was bipolar. And although over the past few weeks both of them had been doing pretty well, mental illness-wise, that didn't mean either of them were cured.

"Hey," Eddie said, tugging Richie's hand, "Let's go for a walk, yeah? Please?"

"Eds, I'm *fine*." Richie insisted. He almost sounded annoyed, but Eddie just stood up and tugged his hand again.

"Please?" Eddie added and Richie just looked up at him with wide eyes before nodding and standing too.

"Everything g-g-good?" Bill asked, looking worried. Eddie just nodded.

"We're gonna go on a walk. I'm just getting a little antsy, sitting for so long." Eddie lied. Richie squeezed his hand in appreciation.

"Oh, okay. Don't go too far, yeah?" Mike added.

"Of course, we won't be too long." Eddie assured, before leading Richie up the stairs and out of the room.

"You guys aren't leaving to have sex in the barn are you?" Mike called after them, which Richie responded to with a finger thrown over his shoulder and nothing more (which was another indicator that something was wrong. Richie never passed up the opportunity for a sex joke).

Eddie laced Richie's fingers with his as they walked outside, letting the door swing shut behind them with a definitive click. Richie looked down at him with that smile that never seemed to leave his lips.

"I take it you want to talk?" Richie asked and wow that was a lot of bitterness in one short sentence that was said with a smile.

"We don't have to just yet. We can just walk." Eddie reasoned with a shrug. He noticed a swing set on the other side of the yard and started walking towards that.

"Okay." Richie muttered, following Eddie's lead. Eddie could feel the other boy's eyes on him but he didn't want to look over just yet, instead looking up at the clouds that were slowly moving across the blue sky.

The two of them were quiet for a long, fragile moment.

"Can I push you?" Richie asked when they got to the swing set and Eddie looked up at it suspiciously.

"It doesn't look too sturdy..." Eddie complained, but when he turned finally and looked at his boyfriend, he saw the hopeful expression on his face and decided to get on the swing anyway.

"Alright, I suppose you can." Eddie jumped up on the swing and Richie ran his hands along Eddie's sides as he moved around him to

get ready to push.

“You know, some might say this is a pretty romantic moment.” Richie teased as he pulled Eddie back a bit, gently running his hands over Eddie’s forearms before pushing him gently on the swing.

“Some might. The amount of rust that’s on this thing might make it a little less romantic but...”

“Nah, I don’t think so.” Richie argued, voice fond. They went like that for a while, not talking, just swinging, until finally Richie let Eddie gently come to a stop and instead climbed into the seat next to him, looking kind of resigned.

“You wanna talk about what happened back there?” Eddie asked, twisting his seat to turn to face Richie next to him, “It seemed like you were dissociating.” He said bluntly and Richie winced.

“I might’ve been.”

“Richie, come on. It’s *me*. You can talk to me about this stuff.” Eddie pleaded as he grabbed Richie’s hands and intertwined them with his.

“It’s just... *fuck*. I thought things were better. They had been so much better with you and with everyone and yes, I *knew* in the back of my mind that this fucking *shit* would come back but it still *fucking* sucks. It sucks that I can be surrounded by the people I love the most and still... feel like I’m going numb. I hate it.” Richie groaned. He kicked the dirt with the toe of this shoe angrily.

“Rich, I’m *so sorry*,” he stood up out of his swing and wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, pulling his head to his chest. He felt Richie wrap his arms around him in return as Eddie slid his hands in to Richie’s hair, “I wish there was something I could do.” He whispered, feeling helpless as he felt Richie’s gentle sobs.

“You’re doing it right now,” Richie said against his chest, “Just being here means... so much.”

Eddie nodded and just kept holding his boyfriend to him, running his fingers through his hair soothingly.

"I'm not going anywhere." Eddie whispered and felt Richie take a deep breath.

"I'm so sorry, Eds. God, this is so *embarrassing*." Richie whined, burrowing his head further into Eddie's chest.

"*Hey*," Eddie snapped, pulling back slightly so Richie could look up at him, "Don't say that. Do you think I should be embarrassed about last week when I had that anxiety attack at the carnival? Or when I had to stop when we were making out because I needed my inhaler even though I *don't have asthma*? Or when—"

"No, of course not, Eds, but that's dif—"

"It is the same *exact* thing. So *beep-fucking beep*, Richie. We all need help sometimes babe, *please* don't be afraid to ask me for it." Eddie tried to sound as sincere as possible and he was pretty sure he got the message across when Richie smiled at him blindingly and then leaned up to press their lips together sweetly.

"I am so lucky." Richie muttered, wiping away the tears from under his glasses.

"Me too. I think that's the longest amount of time I've ever heard you not make a joke?" Eddie teased. Richie barked out a laugh.

"Don't get used to it, Eddie Spaghetti. Jokes are 80% of my soul."

"80% jokes, 20% pure adoration of Eddie Kaspbrak."

"You're *not* wrong."

###

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, what the hell is going on here?" Eddie asked, shocked, as they descended the steps into the basement. He waved a hand in front of his face to try and unclog the smell from his nose but he knew it would be futile.

Bev looked up at him with wide eyes from where she was holding the bong, staring at him for a long moment before blowing out a stream of smoke.

"I don't know." Beverly responded, handing the bong to Mike next to her.

"They're smoking *marijuana*, Eddie." Stan said from where he was sitting in Bill's lap on the couch.

"And Stan is pouting about it." Ben teased, reaching his leg over to kick Stan's gently. His eyes were already a little red and Stan glared at him.

"Am not." Stan retorted.

"You are... a little bit, babe." Bill said, squeezing his arms around him tighter. Stan just rolled his eyes.

"I just know I'm gonna be the one that has to take care of you loaded fucks! Too much responsibility." He groaned, throwing his hands up in the air dramatically and Richie laughed.

"You're such a drama queen, Stanley. You know if you smoked some yourself, you wouldn't have to take care of anyone. We can make Bill the designated, if you think we need one so bad." Richie reasoned.

"Hey! Why me?" Bill protested.

"Well, everyone else is already high." Richie said with a shrug, laughing as Mike tried to make rings with the smoke he blew out of his mouth.

"You're not. *Eddie* isn't." Stan pointed out and Richie looked up at his boyfriend, who was still standing at his shoulder despite Richie having plopped onto the carpet next to Mike.

"You wanna smoke with me, right Eddie Spaghetti?" Richie asked and instead of the scolding for the nickname that he expected, he just saw Eddie looking down at him with concerned eyes.

"You sure this is a good idea?" he whispered, running his fingers through Richie's curls, "After you were just-" Richie cut him off with a nod.

"Yeah, it'll help. Especially after you put me in a better mood."

Richie assured with a grin. Eddie smiled and looked around at the group nervously before sighing loudly.

“Okay, I guess I’ll try it.” he said, causing a majority of the group to cheer, “But there is not fucking way I am putting my mouth on that thing without sanitizing it first.” Eddie swore as he stared at the bong with disgust.

“No worries, babe. You want me to roll you a blunt?”

“I just used the last skin for Ben’s, sorry. Just shotgun him?” Bev suggested with a glint in her eye and Richie grinned.

“Well, twist my leg why don’t you.” Richie laughed and Eddie looked suspicious.

“What is shotgun? Are you gonna kill him?” Stan asked, leaning a little off of Bill. Beverly laughed and shook her head.

“No, it’s just an easier way to smoke.” Bev assured, “You’ll see.”

“Here, Eds, sit next to me.” Richie pulled his boyfriend down next to him and took the offered bong. “Okay, you ready?” Richie asked him. Eddie’s brown eyes were wide and he was biting his lip nervously and *fuck* he was so cute.

“As I’ll ever be.” Eddie breathed. Richie smiled widely at him before looking down, lighting the bowl, and taking a long hit. He pulled the smoke into his lungs before turning to Eddie, who was looking at him like he had *no idea* what was going on.

Richie pulled him close and fit their lips together, blowing out slow. And of course, Eddie immediately pulled back and started coughing. Richie laughed and shook his head.

“Eds! You didn’t even breathe in!” Richie poked Eddie’s chest, “You have to pull it to your lungs, like with your inhaler.” Richie explained and Eddie shook his head as if to clear it.

“Yeah, sorry, I know that, you just... distracted me.” He said with a blush that made Richie fight a smirk.

“It’s okay. Let’s try again.” Richie said softly, already feeling his head go a little mushy around the edges. He took another pull off the bong and when he leaned towards Eddie this time, the boy had a determined look in his eyes that made Richie want to groan.

They fit their lips together again and Richie felt Eddie suck the smoke in as he blew out and *fuck* if it wasn’t the hottest thing he had ever done, and that said a lot considering he knew for a fact that *all of his friends were currently staring at him*.

Even knowing that, the feel of Eddie’s lips on his was electric. It wasn’t the first time they’d kissed, not at all, but this somehow felt more *intimate*.

When Richie pulled back, Eddie’s eyes were dazed and he was staring at Richie, still holding his breath. After a long moment, Richie finally prompted him, “You know you can blow the smoke out now.”

“Oh thank God,” he said as he pushed the smoke out of his lungs, “I didn’t know how long I was supposed to hold it in.” Which of course made everyone in the circle laugh, including Eddie, who brought a hand to his mouth when the noises that came out sounded more like giggles.

“I’ll try it if you do that, Bill.” Stan added, mid-laugh, making Bill blush.

“It was pretty hot.” Bill admitted, tucking his face into Stan’s neck.

“Oh my God, you’re so in love with Eddie.”

###

Richie felt all floaty and perfect and warm. He had Eddie in his lap and his friends all around him and they were watching Miss Congeniality and literally nothing was wrong.

“I think I wanna buy some chickens.” Bill mused a loud, staring at the corner with a blank, heavy-lidded stare.

“You’re not buying chickens.” Stan responded immediately, sitting up straighter and looking at his boyfriend like he was crazy.

“Why not? Mike has chickens.” Bill pouted.

“No I don’t. We have sheep, no chickens.” Mike said, not lifting his head from where it was pillowed on Ben’s thigh.

“If you get chickens, Bill, we should get three and name them Adele, Shakira, and Beyoncé.” Richie told him as if stating a revelation. Which in his opinion he was.

“You can’t name a chicken Beyoncé! It’s blasphemy!” Eddie argued, pushing Richie’s shoulder and then promptly laying back down on it.

“I don’t think I could... *not* name one Beyoncé, though, Ed.”

“Yeah, I guess that’s true. I guess... Okay, I approve those names, Bill.”

“He’s *not* buying chickens!” Stan groaned, “Why are you guys encouraging him? Bev, a little help?” But she was useless, giggling loudly on floor at the whole situation.

“We should play truth or dare!” she said with a gasp, sitting up straight. Eddie laughed and shook his head.

“Sorry, no. Stan and I made a rule a long time ago that said Bill can’t play that game anymore.” Eddie explained and Richie... heard it. But he had to really focus, because Eddie was running his hand over Richie’s forearm, making random patterns and it was incredibly distracting. As was the whole of his warmth pressed against him and the way the smell of his hair was right under Richie’s nose and the way his shorts were bunched a little higher up on his thigh with the way he was sitting and-

He was just very very distracting.

“Aww, why not?” Beverly groaned.

“He’s just *bad* at it.” Stan said, laughing, “He either goes way too big with all his dares or way to small. It’s either, *I dare you to do a somersault* or *I dare you to call your mom and tell her you’ve been kidnapped and you’re dying!*” Everyone laughed in response, making Bill pout.

"I'm not that bad!"

"It's that bad." Stan grinned, "It's okay. Let's play and Bill can only offer truths, no dares."

"Yay!!" Bev exclaimed. She grabbed the empty Sprite bottle from the table and gestured for everyone to join her on the floor, "We can use this to decide who goes so there's no favoritism. Because let's be honest, Richie would pick Eddie every time, so."

"That's fair." Richie said as he wrapped his arm around Eddie and pulled him tight to his side, with only minimal grumbling in response since the boy was all pliable and happy.

"Okay, me first!" Beverly said excitedly, grabbing the bottle and giving it a big spin, "Richie!" she screamed when it landed on him and honestly, he hadn't even noticed. Eddie was biting his lip now and Richie found it pointless to look at anything else.

But then it was his turn so, he supposed he had to stop staring.

"Truth or dare, trashmouth?" Bev asked and Richie didn't even have to think about it.

"Dare."

"Okay... I dare you to spin the bottle and whoever it lands on... you have to give a sincere and complete compliment that doesn't involve any jokes at all." Beverly explained and... it was a lot of words said fast but yeah, he could do that.

"Here goes," Richie muttered and when the bottle landed on Mike he smiled. All of them would've been easy but this one is literally the easiest ever, "Mike! That's so easy. Mike," Richie said, looking directly into the boy's eyes, "You are literally the nicest person I have ever met. It isn't this obvious kind of sweetness either, it is like this genuine, casual, beautiful sweetness that extends so deep within you and it is just so easy to talk to you about anything and so easy to be your friend because you are nice and dependable and I am so glad I met you. You're also very funny. And you have amazing thighs."

"Oh, wow, that was really nice, Richie, thank you." Mike said,

smiling widely. Richie, of course, blew a kiss to him before reaching down to spin the bottle himself.

“Billy!” Richie yelled, pumped as FUCK, “Truth or dare, my man?”

“D-dare, I guess.” Bill chose, sounding completely resigned. Richie cackled and thought for a long moment.

“I dare you to... twerk on Stan.” Richie announced. The sounds of everyone’s laughter was the only thing that could cover up Bill’s moans of protest.

“I have N-NO idea how to twerk! I have no ass!” Bill argued.

“No! You have a great ass!” Ben cut in through his laughter and everyone agreed.

“Here, I’ll teach you.” Mike said, hopping up and pulling Bill and Stan with him. He sat Stan, who was almost redder than Bill from how much he was laughing, down on the couch and moved Bill in front of him.

“Okay, just lean forward and put your hands on your knees,” Mike demonstrated, getting hands on as Bev pulled out her camera to record it, despite Bill’s half-hearted glares, “Then try to move your very lower back like... inwards. And then down? Do you know what I mean? Like that! Yeah! That’s good!”

“Can this be over now?” Stan asked from the couch, staring at the scene before him through the cracks in his fingers.

“Oh please, y-you loved it.” Bill teased as he stood up and pulled Stan back to the circle with him, “thanks for the help, Mike.” Bill added, finally laughing too now.

“Of course, Billy! You’re a quick learner.”

“It was the best thing I’ve ever seen.” Ben giggled as he rested his head on Beverly’s shoulder, clutching his stomach, “I want to tattoo it on the inside of my eyelids.”

“Okay, okay, let’s move on.” Bill insisted, “Eddie!”

“Huh!” Eddie said, snapping up, “I was *not* asleep.” He said immediately, rubbing at his eyes.

“Oh my god, stop it, you are so fucking cute.” Richie groaned, burying his face in Eddie’s hair.

“Ugh, *stop*, is it my turn? Are we still playing truth or dare?” Eddie asked, looking around, his usually wide eyes droopy.

“Yes, truth or dare, Ed?” Bill asked.

“Truth.” Eddie answered definitively.

“Coward.” Ben said under a cough and Eddie stared at him indignantly.

“Hey! Truths can be scary too! Plus, Bill can’t do dares. It’s against the rules.” He pouted and Ben nodded in agreement.

“That’s fair I guess. Okay, what’s the truth?” Ben asked, turning to Bill. Bill looked around, seeming kind of stressed.

“Um... I don’t wanna do this wrong but... biggest kink? Is that too much, Stan? T-too little? I can’t even tell. My confidence has been sh-shaken.” Bill asked and Stan laughed and kissed his cheek.

“It’s perfect, babe. Eddie, biggest kink?” Stan repeated. Eddie thought about it for a second and Richie tried not to look too excited to find out.

“I’m not sure what qualifies as a kink. Like is being on top, me liking riding, is that a kink? Or just a thing? Or does it have to be like *spanking*?”

“Okay, I’m dead. I have to go.” Richie groaned, “I can’t do this.” Eddie laughed on his lap and that was *not helping*.

“Shut up, Richie,” Beverly rolled her eyes across from him, “Let your boyfriend tell us more about his sexual preferences.”

“Why is everyone in love with my boyfriend? @God why?”

“Aww, I love it when you speak in meme, babe.” Eddie teased, “Oh! I changed my mind, I don’t wanna reveal anything personal so let’s just say Richie is my kink.” Eddie said proudly and Richie scoffed.

“Eds, you kind of already revealed the personal thing.” Richie laughed. Eddie opened his mouth to argue but then shut it slowly.

“Oh, right. Sorry.” Eddie leaned back against Richie and groaned again, “Do we have to keep playing? I’m really sleepy.”

“I can’t decide if I love it or if I am disappointed by the fact that he’s a fall-asleep-high-person.” Ben mused, staring up at Eddie.

“I love it. I get cuddles.” Richie said, wrapping his arms around his boyfriend, “But I do think I should take him home. You guys keep playing though. I’ll text you later?” everyone nodded in agreement and waved their goodbyes as they walked out, Eddie’s head still resting on Richie’s shoulder.

“You wanna come to my place or should I take you back to yours?” Richie asked the snuggly boy in his arms.

“Hmm, can’t go home. I smell like weed. I’ll just call and say I’m sleeping over at Bill’s... if it’s okay if I stay at yours?”

“Of course, Eds. Of course.” He literally wouldn’t want it any other way.

Notes for the Chapter:

THANK YOU FOR ALL THE SUPPORT I AM SO
GRATEFUL!!!!!!

Works inspired by this one:

- [Он Спрашивает, Как У Меня Дела](#) by [secov1](#)